



THERE WILL BE BLOOD

Witty, wise and warm-hearted, it's ironic that Kate Beckinsale's life, both personally and professionally, has been somewhat defined by playing a vampire in the cult favourite *Underworld* franchise. Words: Gill Pringle

Cast in 2003 as sexy, kick-ass vampire warrior Selene, Kate Beckinsale wed *Underworld* director and co-creator Len Wiseman, with their 12-year marriage coming to an end earlier this year.

With the franchise outlasting their marriage, Beckinsale, 43, now returns for a fifth outing as the 'Death Dealer' in *Underworld: Blood Wars*, directed by Anna Foerster.

"I'm all about as many vaginas being involved as possible," jokes Beckinsale when *STACK* meets with her backstage at Madison Square Garden, prior to the unveiling of the film's trailer at New York Comic-Con.

"I don't think gender has much to do with whether you're a good or bad director. I know it's coming up a lot because an action heroine used to be unusual and now it's less unusual. I hope in a few years time a woman director will be less unusual as well," says the actress who, prior to meeting Wiseman, was involved in an eight-year relationship with Michael Sheen, with whom she has a 17-year-old daughter, Lily, who plans to follow in her



parents' thespian footsteps.

"I think it is cool for us to have a franchise that has a female at the centre of it to also have a female director's take," she adds. "Selene is a fairly emotional character for someone who doesn't show a lot of emotion, so it's nice that Anna was interested in that component of the character. I don't know if that's because she's a woman or just because she's Anna."

The daughter of beloved British comedy star Richard Beckinsale, Kate made her first TV appearance, aged four. A year later, her father

would die unexpectedly of a heart attack at just 31 years old.

Both beautiful and precocious, Beckinsale could easily have rode her father's coattails but instead pursued a degree in French and Russian literature at Britain's prestigious Oxford University, during which time she won her first movie role in Kenneth Branagh's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Reflecting on her 13 years with the *Underworld* franchise, she's not sure what advice she would give her

younger self, embarking on her first time out as Selene. "I don't think I would tell her that you have to do four or five of these... I was so expecting to be fired on the first one because it's not my thing, it was such a big stretch for me."

"I was at a period in my career – I'm still sort of in it – where a big prerequisite was that if something really terrifies me and makes me want to hide under the bed, then that's a good idea to do it. I just had never imagined myself doing anything like that."

"We had quite a low budget. Very often →

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continued

we had squibs blowing up and we only had one go. I kept thinking, 'I'm going to ruin it and they're just going to get someone who does this for a living.' So I think it would have alarmed me if I'd known there were going to be so many of them," she muses.

Consistently voted as one of the sexiest women in the world, Beckinsale relishes her position as an iconic screen femme fatale. "Obviously there has always been Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, but for this kind of movie, at the time we only had Linda Hamilton and Sigourney Weaver, who were amazing, but there weren't a lot of references. Being a small part of moving that needle feels really great. I've got a 17-year-old daughter, and it's very normal for her to have a female-led franchise which is number one at the box office. It wasn't necessarily the same for me growing up. As the youngest with four brothers, it feels good."

If *Underworld* has played a large role in her career, she hopes this isn't what she will only be remembered for, pointing to her recent acclaimed performance as Lady Susan Vernon in *Love & Friendship*, Whit Stillman's comedic take on Jane Austen's novella *Lady Susan*.

"I've been lucky that I have been able to travel back and forth between things. I don't think that these kind of movies are necessarily what get critics really hot under the collar and excited. But one doesn't just make movies for critics. And also, as an actor, it's important to have a lot of different parts to your palette. For example, I didn't go to drama school, I went to Oxford. I was used to doing literary adaptations and I really did need *Underworld* in terms of physical training that I never got. So it's been very useful for me in terms of other work that I have done, where suddenly I became really good at stuff that I sucked at, and that I was pushed to the limits on.

"So, in terms of my entire career, *Underworld* has been a really big part in



opening up my toolbox as an actor; it's just not necessarily going to win me an Oscar."

Currently single and anticipating an empty nest, she looks forward to stretching herself. "I stopped doing theatre when I had a baby, but I hope to return to the stage quite soon. My daughter probably wouldn't care if I didn't come home now that she's 17, but certainly that was prohibitive for a long time. The slightly less hands-on motherhood thing has been an interesting thing. But I just have to watch out I don't have another one!" she teases.

If Beckinsale doesn't always have the opportunity to test the boundaries of her

naughty humour, then her *Underworld* co-star Theo James was the brunt of many jokes on the *Blood Wars* set.

"I heard that Theo was really frightened of ferrets. I was bored. So we had an enterprising crew, and in moments we had a ferret put on set to scare him," she reveals. "It was a very attractive ferret... it actually looked a bit like Theo. Big eyes, great

cheekbones."

One of the crew members ended up adopting the ferret, though James grew attached and held interviews to decide who would make the most responsible pet parent.

After the ferret gag tired, Beckinsale also made use of a silicone version of James's torso, built to emulate the actor's screen injuries.

"Theo has some injuries in the movie, and they made him a prosthetic stomach. It had all of the same pubes and stuff that Theo has," she giggles.

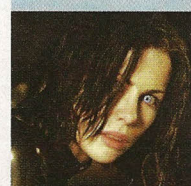
"We would go pay little visits to it and

UNDERWORLD

The story so far...

UNDERWORLD (2003)

Selene falls for a human/Lycan hybrid named Michael and uncovers a plot to destroy the Vampire Elders.



UNDERWORLD: EVOLUTION (2006)

Selene awakens the Vampire Elder, Markus, and discovers his Lycan heritage.

UNDERWORLD: RISE OF THE LYCANS (2009)

The origin of the Vampire/Lycan war is revealed – and a forbidden love is at the heart of it all!



UNDERWORLD: AWAKENING (2012)

Humans declare war on Vampires and Lycans, and Selene is defrosted after 12 years in stasis to find she has a hybrid daughter.



take pictures of ourselves licking it. We left little offerings, little bowls of raisins and stuff."

STACK is later joined by James, who confesses to his anxiety over co-starring with the gorgeous Beckinsale. "I was quite nervous at first. I was naked and sweating and Kate is very glamorous, so I was shivering and jibbering. But Kate's sense of humour always helps in any situation." ☺

• *Underworld: Blood Wars* is in cinemas on Dec 1

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